

Using a causal warrant, a debater usually points to one event and claims that event is the cause of a second event. When arguing that one phenomenon is causally related to another, questions of relevance arise. One of the simpler questions involves how the two events or phenomena are related to each other in time. Quite obviously, the cause needs to come before the effect. For instance, suppose a debater claims that the Warsaw Ghetto uprising caused *Kristallnacht*, a series of violent, anti-Jewish attacks led by Nazi Party officials and Nazi storm troopers. A perceptive and knowledgeable audience would quickly realize that the Warsaw uprising could not possibly have caused *Kristallnacht* because the uprising was in 1943 and *Kristallnacht* occurred November 9–10, 1938. In this case, the debater has chosen as the cause an event that occurred after the effect. Consequently, this causal argument does not meet the relevance standard.

Thus, when constructing arguments, you must pay attention to the question of relevance. How is the evidence related to the claim? This test is a minimal one. A debater's evidence may be related to the claim but still be insufficient to prove it.

THE STANDARD OF SUFFICIENCY

The evidence included in an argument can meet the standards of acceptability and relevance and still not be sufficient. In formal, deductive logic the test of sufficiency is quite simple: if the first premise (evidence) is true, then the claim cannot possibly be false. That simplicity is not present in arguments involving subjects about which we ordinarily debate.

The question of sufficiency involves how much certainty we require to assent to a claim. In the case of argument in the social sciences, for instance, arguments in support of a research hypothesis are considered sufficient only if the researcher is able to report results that exceed a preset probability—usually 95 percent or 99 percent—that the hypothesis is false. Social scientists call these “levels of significance.” If the scientist is not able to say something like “the odds my results are accurate are 95 percent,” then the scientist's results are said not to be sufficient.

A different context provides a different example: the standard of proof used in the U.S. criminal court system. In that system, a person may not be declared guilty of a crime unless the jury is convinced “beyond a reasonable doubt.” The jury may view the evidence as acceptable and the connections between the evidence and the crime may be relevant, but unless the jury is convinced that no “reasonable doubt” of innocence remains, they must return a verdict of not guilty. In fact, the jury could examine all the evidence and conclude that the preponderance of evidence points to a guilty verdict and still return a not-guilty verdict because their certainty rises “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

The standard of sufficiency in the criminal court system is “beyond a reasonable doubt”; the standard of sufficiency in the U.S. civil court system requires only proof by a preponderance of evidence. In a highly publicized criminal trial, O. J. Simpson was found not guilty of murdering Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman. In a later civil case, Simpson was forced to compensate the families of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman with a huge sum because the jury found that he had killed her. On the surface, these two verdicts seem incompatible. In the first case, however, the standard of sufficiency was higher than in the second.